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SUBJECT: NINEWAH: PROVINCIAL ELECTIONS CHIEF SAYS SECURITY INCIDENTS HAVE NOT DERAILED VOTER REGISTRATION

Classified By: Ninewa PRT Leader Alex Laskaris, Reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

This is a Ninewa Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) message.

Summary

1. (C) Despite security incidents affecting four Voter Registration Centers (VRCs) since July 15, the registration process in Ninewa is going &better than expected," according to Governorate Electoral Office (GEO) Director Abdel Haleq. In a July 17 meeting, Abdel Haleq told us he has employed an aggressive outreach process, including working with local imams, to encourage registration. There have been some relocations of VRCs; PRT is following up to ensure these take place on legitimate reasons, for instance on security grounds or in order to increase access to potential registrants, as opposed to being moves to disenfranchise some voting groups, as is sometimes alleged. End summary

Voter Registration Off to a Good Start

2. (C) On July 17, GEO Director Abdel Haleq met with two members of Ninewa PRT and three representatives from 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiment to discuss the status of voter registration. According to Abdel Haleq, each VRC has been seeing an average of 100)150 Ninewa residents per day and 1-2 Internally Displaced Persons per day. He thought this was on the low side, but expects the numbers to increase as the deadline for registration approaches. (Note: According to the Independent High Electoral Commission (IHEC), VRCs in Ninewa have had the largest turnout of any in the country each of the days the centers have been open. End Note) The ongoing voter registration awareness campaign is being conducted in Arabic, Kurdish, Turkoman, and Assyrian using television, radio, and print media. As an additional measure, Abdel Haleq has recently enlisted the help of local imams to help get the message out.

GEO Director Claims Less Violence than Expected

3. (C) Abdel Haleq confirmed there have been four security incidents during the registration process. At Babjadede, an IHEC guard was killed by sniper fire. At al Yarmook, a group of men entered the center as if they were going to register, then severely beat staff and destroyed furniture. The staff resigned, but the VRC was restaffed and reopened in three days. The staff at Tal Abta also resigned due to threats, so the VRC has been moved to a safer location in Al Hather. At al Jazar, a VBIED went off near the center and shots were fired near the VRC, but there were no injuries. Responsibility for the incidents is not known. According to the Director, security is generally adequate, and although &terrorist activity8 remains one of his biggest challenges, the level of violence is less than he expected.

Some Movement of VRC Locations

¶4. (C) When asked about allegations that a VRC in Sinjar had been moved from a predominantly Arab area (Bouleje) to a predominantly Kurdish Area (Talabonat), Abdel Haleq said he was unaware but would follow up immediately to determine the veracity of the report. In general, elections officials have been willing to move VRCs as necessary. In addition to the move from Tal Abta to Al Hather for security reasons, VRCs in Zuhur, Gayara, and Ribiyah have been moved to locations where security blockades will be less of a disruption to people trying to access the facility.

¶5. (C) Comment: While so far there has been no large scale violence interfering with the registration process, the four security incidents have forced elections officials to react quickly lest the threat of violence selectively disenfranchise certain ethnic or sectarian groups. Because movement of VRCs could arouse suspicion that authorities are seeking to suppress or augment registration of certain groups, PRT will follow up to ensure we understand the motivations and consequences of such moves. To support GEO outreach efforts, PRT will inquire how other religious and secular leaders can help spread the word too.
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